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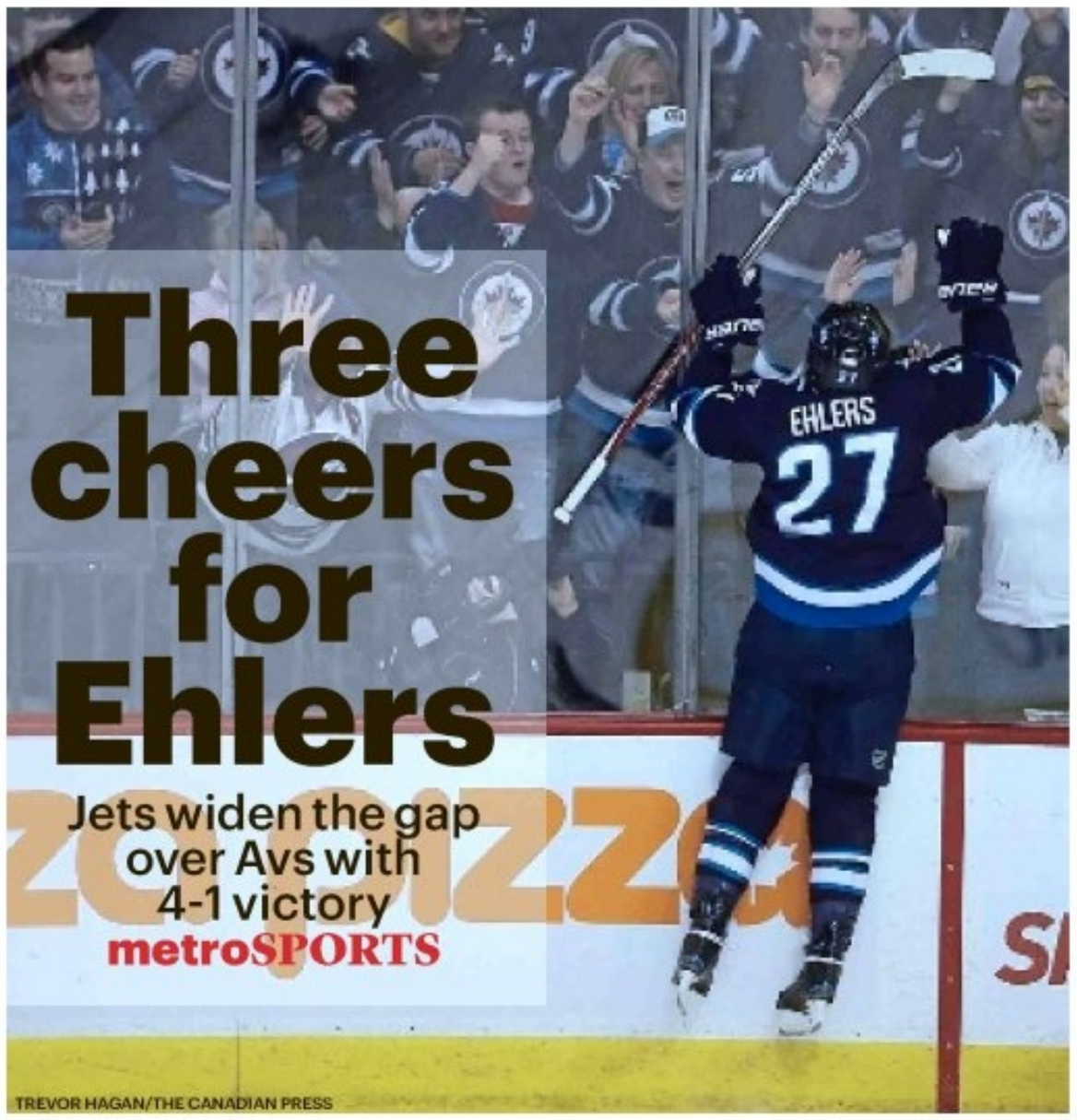

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Time of change for city's Syrians

REFUGEES

High volume of refugees transferring to social assistance

Braeden Jones
Metro | Winnipeg

About a year ago, Winnipeg began welcoming wave after wave of federally sponsored Syrian refugees.

They were greeted with one year of federal government assistance to get their feet under them.

As time ticks on past that period and onto month 13, thousands of refugees will transition from that federal support to provincial social assistance.

Now, just as their arrival was staggered, so too is that transition.

"So we are now experiencing month 13 every single month," said Rita Thahal, director of the Manitoba Interfaith immigration Council — Welcome Place — which was responsible for a bulk of the settlement and now that transition.

She said before the massive influx of refugees fleeing wartorn Syria, Welcome Place had a steady rhythm of helping a few families each month move onto social assistance.

"The difference now is the volume, the number of people moving from that (federal) government assistance to the provincial is just much higher," Thahal said.

To illustrate that point, she shared some rough numbers.

November was 'month 13' for eight Syrian families, those of whom arrived earliest last year.

"In December we will have 25 Syrian families who are going to transfer, in January there will be 50-plus families. … In February there will be another 50-plus," Thahal explained.

"In total from November 201 to March 2017 there will be 200 families transferring to social assistance."

That volume has posed challenges, but Welcome Place and others are adapting to meet the changing needs.

"With the high numbers we want to make sure that no one gets left behind or falls between the cracks," Thahal said.

To make sure the Syrian families understand their new funding source, Thahal said there are ongoing information sessions in Arabic. Normally, families would be set up to meet with an income assistance counsellor on an individual basis, but because of the volume, and what Thahal calls "language skills that were much lower than anticipated," the group sessions were necessary.

Thahal explained improving the refugees' English language skills, and helping them find work continue to be ongoing challenges. In fact, she estimates that more than half are still looking for work.

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metro NEWS
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Man discovers sisters he saved from fire in 1951 are his next-door neighbours. **Canada**

Premier to spend two months at Costa Rican vacation home

VACATION

Brian Pallister says he'll work, spend time with family

Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister plans to spend six to eight weeks a year at his vacation home in Costa Rica during his time in office, including this holiday season, but says he will be getting work done while there.

"When I go down there, I work," Pallister said in a year-end interview at his legislature office.

"I work at things that I don't get interrupted at, and I do get some time with my family, which is great because I don't get much time with my family when I'm here."

Pallister's Costa Rica travels came under fire in the election campaign in the spring, when a CBC investigation revealed Pallister had spent roughly one in five days travelling to or in Costa Rica since being elected Progressive Conservative leader in 2012.

A few weeks earlier, Pallister had told the Winnipeg Free Press that he had not been in Costa Rica in early 2016 when in fact he had been.

The premier and his staff appear to have now adopted a more upfront communications plan on his southern trips, said Royce Koop, a political studies professor at the University of Manitoba.

"It does seem to be the case that they've adopted the strategy of getting ahead of this," Koop said.

"They're being open with the amount of time he's going to be away instead of allowing the opposition to figure it out and break it as a story."

Pallister said one reason he spent so much time in Costa Rica initially was because he was developing his property. The Costa Rica Star newspaper reported earlier this year that Pallister owns three properties that cover a combined five hectares.

Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister arrives to take part in a meeting of First Ministers and National Indigenous Leaders in Ottawa on Friday, Dec. 9, 2016. THE CANADIAN PRESS

He also said the 10 months a year he spends in Manitoba is more than a year's worth of work.

"I typically work a 60-hour week, so in the 10 months that I am here, I'm typically doing 15 months of work, and I'm proud of that. "Pallister men, on their headstones, they just want 'he was a good worker.'"

THE CANADIAN PRESS

CITY NEWS

Pedestrian critically hurt in Winnipeg truck crash

A woman was rushed to the hospital in critical condition Sunday afternoon after she was hit by a truck in Winnipeg in the area of Henderson Highway and Kimberly Avenue.

Police said the adult female pedestrian sustained critical injuries and remains in hospital. BRAEDEN JONES/ METRO

Woman in Montreal was allegedly driven to Winnipeg to work as escort

Police have arrested a man after receiving a report a woman was allegedly threatened in Montreal, driven to Winnipeg and then forced to work as an escort. Winnipeg Police say they went to a hotel on Friday, and were told the 23-year-old woman was being held against her will.

Police took the woman into their care and arrested a suspect, and say they continue to investigate. The suspect has been charged with trafficking in persons, assault with a weapon and advertising sexual services.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Faces of Winnipeg by David Lipnowski

Thuy is a mother of two, and is very close with her family. Her friends call her Tiffany, and she is originally from Vietnam. Her family left the country when she was seven years old as the Vietnam War came to a close. Their family didn't have freedom in Vietnam so they left for North America. Tiffany has since lived all over the continent. She spent 25 years in Los Angeles where she worked as a furniture designer, then she moved to Chicago where her father owned salons. She learned the business and she is now a successful entrepreneur, owning spas all over North America including two in Winnipeg. Tiffany ended up in Winnipeg 10 years ago as her mom lives here. Having lived all over the world, she finds the city very cosy, and loves the friendly people who call Winnipeg home. When not running her businesses, she likes to spend her time reading as well as hanging out with her employees who are like family.

Faces of Winnipeg This is a new weekly Metro series, to appear in every Monday's edition. In 2013, local photographer David Lipnowski launched his art project, A Portrait a Day, in which he captured everyday Winnipeggers on the city's streets. You could say this series is an extension of that exhibit.

From Russia, without his love

IMMIGRATION

Repeated visa denials keep Siberian couple apart

Jessica Botelho-Urbanski
For Metro | Winnipeg

The story of a young Siberian couple struggling to reunite in Winnipeg illustrates the wider challenges of those at the mercy of visa facilitation service centres, according to a private immigration consultant.

Alex Kondakov, 24, and Sonya Kondakov, 25, met when they were both 18 years old on their first day of university in Siberia.

The pair of international relations students eventually married and planned to move to Canada together, after determining there weren't enough opportunities for them in Russia.

Alex made the move first in September 2014 upon receiving a graduate scholarship to study politics at the University of Manitoba.

Sonya has tried three times since his move to get a temporary visa to come visit.

She's been denied repeatedly and given different reasons why each time, according to documents from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

The documents cite concerns about a lack of financial stability and say Sonya doesn't have sufficient family ties or a purpose to come to Canada.

"After all these visa refusals I felt absolutely broken. What's wrong with me?" she said in recent email to Metro.

"This is still very shocking and hard to understand — why it is hard for young, active and educated people to come to Canada at least to see their family?"

Alex Kondakov turned to crowdfunding in hopes of paying his way to Siberia to reunite with his wife Sonya, inset, over the holidays. JESSICA BOTELHO-URBANSKI/METRO (INSET: CONTRIBUTED)

Since Sonya can't come here, Alex plans to visit her as soon as possible.

He was hoping to go in December, but that was before the University of Manitoba Faculty Association went on a prolonged strike.

> I've been here for two years and now the community is fighting for us — for her. Alex Kondakov

Because of the strike, Alex wasn't immediately able to present his thesis to a panel of professors. He had to extend his study permit instead, falling further into debt.

So the cash-strapped student turned to crowdfunding in hopes of paying his way to Siberia to reunite with his wife over the holidays. At the time of writing, he had reached $850 of his $1600 GoFundMe goal.

"While we were speaking, we got $100. Oh my God! Twenty-seven minutes ago," Alex said after sneaking a peek at his phone.

"That is absolutely insane. I've been here for two years and now the community is fighting for us — for her."

They also have a private immigration consultant, Rosanna Pancotto, on their side.

Pancotto has helped file Sonya's last two visa applications and been dumbfounded by some of the Visa Facilitation Service centre's actions in Moscow.

The VFS centre asked for Sonya's passport, then mailed it back to her without notice in an unmarked envelope, Pancotto said. They also asked for Alex's medical records months after he'd already sent them.

"I don't think the government fully understands that these VFS Centres are hindering a lot of people's ability to come and visit even (their) parents," Pancotto said.

"It's difficult for a person to bring their mom, their dad, their brother here, just for a visit. They're getting denied and VFS plays a role."

Pancotto is putting together a proposal to stop the use of Visa Facilitation Services or VACs (Visa Application Centres) — third-party companies she believes the government shouldn't be relying on to sift through immigration paperwork.

She'll be submitting the proposal to the public safety minister's office in early 2017.

In an email statement, the federal immigration office said the Canadian government liaises with 132 visa application centres in 95 countries to standardize visa applications around the world.

Pancotto wants to see applicants be able to send their information directly to the Canadian embassies, without needing to communicate with a third party.

"Every single time you can't get through to the embassy. You have to be able to use VFS centres and one of the worst ones I've dealt with is Russia," said Pancotto, who worked for the federal immigration office before moving to private consulting in 2007.

While they wait to reunite, Alex and Sonya speak at least twice a day, taking turns waking each other up via FaceTime thanks to their 13-hour time difference.

"I like it here (in Winnipeg). That's my home. That's why I fight for my wife to be here, so she can benefit and contribute to the community," Alex said.

If and when she arrives, Sonya has a job lined up at an Exchange District clothing store. She hopes to open a bakery or cosmetics shop in Winnipeg one day, with products imported from Europe.

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Canadian among 10 dead in attacks

Security forces stand at the scene of an attack in the central town of Karak, Jordan, on Sunday.
BEN CURTIS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MIDDLE EAST

Another from Canada injured in Jordan

Gunmen ambushed Jordanian police in a series of attacks Sunday, including at a Crusader castle popular with tourists, killing a woman visiting from Canada, seven officers and two local civilians, officials said.

CBC News has reported the Canadian killed was Linda Vatcher, 62, of Burgeo, N.L. The retired teacher was in Jordan on vacation. Among the 34 people wounded is Vatcher's son Chris, who works in the Middle East.

CBC has identified the Canadian killed as Linda Vatcher, 62, of Burgeo, N.L. CONTRIBUTED

Sunday's attack is one of the bloodiest attacks in Jordan in recent memory.

Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion offered the government's condolences to the victims' families.

Security officials said in a statement late Sunday that at least four gunmen were killed and that troops continued to search the area. The statement said large amounts of weapons had been seized. It made no reference to local media reports that at one point, the attackers had held hostages.

The shootings were the latest in a series of attacks that have challenged this pro-Western kingdom's claim to be an oasis of calm in a region threatened by Islamic extremists.

The killing of the Canadian tourist could further hurt Jordan's embattled tourism sector, which has declined sharply since the Islamic State group seized large parts of neighbouring Syria and Iraq two years ago.

After the attack, the Canadian embassy in Jordan tweeted a warning to Canadians, advising them against all travel to Karak until further notice.

The federal government said in an emailed statement Sunday afternoon that Canadian officials were working with local authorities to gather information.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks in and near the central town of Karak, about 140 kilometres south of the capital, Amman.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

From jail to sail for ex-prison

The federal government is being asked to speed up the pace of redevelopment of the land and buildings that once comprised Canada's most notorious prison to make room for a top-notch sailing school.

A local group has put forward a $300-million redevelopment plan for Kingston Penitentiary that would see the jail along the shores of Lake Ontario turned into an elite training centre for Canadian sailors, alongside a new wind power research institute.

The group, which includes former Olympic sailor John Curtis, former Kingston mayor Harvey Rosen and George Hood, a one-time head of fundraising at Queen's University, has been working on the idea since the last inmate left Kingston Pen in 2013.

HISTORY

The surrounding Lake Ontario waters, considered one of the best sites internationally for freshwater sailing, hosted sailing events for the 1976 Montreal Olympics.

The proposal would open up the facility to the water by tearing down all but the northern wall with the large, heavy, barred doors at the prison's entrance. Inside the sprawling property would be two museums documenting the jail's controversial history, as well as new commercial space and condominiums.

The proposal is a limited time offer: Hood said the cash comes off the table come spring if federal and local officials show no interest.

The group isn't asking for any financial help from federal or municipal coffers. What they are asking is for the federal government to sell them the land — and soon.

"They're funding projects across the country to try and stimulate the economy," Hood said in an interview.

"Along we come with an offer to buy a moribund, dormant federal asset, use our money to do it, and it's not going to cost them a cent and we're going to create probably 300 jobs."

Kingston's current mayor, Bryan Paterson, said other groups have also privately expressed interest to him about redeveloping Kingston Penitentiary and now may feel a little more pressure to advance their own proposals. THE CANADIAN PRESS

NEWFOUNDLAND

Answer to man's 65-year-old mystery lived right next door

Edward "Kip" Malone says he has been dogged by the "mystery" of what ever happened to two girls he rescued from a house fire in St. John's in 1951, only to find the answer living right next door.

After about four decades working in Ontario, 77-year-old Malone returned to Newfoundland this fall to retire in Conception Bay South. A week and a half after moving in to their new home, the Malones were welcomed by their next-door neighbour, Margaret Fowler, with packages of frozen fish. Malone — nicknamed "Kip" — discovered that he and Fowler hailed from the same part of St. John's, in fact, he had an interesting story about the street he grew up on.

Kip Malone, centre, with Margaret Fowler, left, and Barbara Earle. BARBARA EARLE

On Dec. 20, 1951, Malone walked past a row of what he described as three-storey, "cardboard" houses, when he heard the sound of a panicked voice coming from above.

Malone says he ran up the stairs and grabbed a frightened five-year-old girl, who refused to leave without her sister. He waded through the haze into another room where he found a three-year-old girl "hiding away," and hauled the sisters outside.

For six and a half decades, Malone says his story didn't have an ending.

"It was always a mystery to me what became of (the girls)," Malone said. "I had never laid eyes on these people since."

Listening to Malone, Fowler said she got goosebumps. She said in an interview that she reached over to give Malone a hug and squeeze his hand.

"I was that little girl," Fowler told him. "I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for you."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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ALBERTA

Fire chief who led the Fort McMurray fight retiring

The man who led a fight against "the beast" is planning to move on from his role as Fort McMurray fire chief. Darby Allen became the face of the community's scramble to beat back a wildfire that laid waste to 10 per cent of the city. Allen is planning to retire and leave Fort McMurray. THE CANADIAN PRESS

O'Leary slammed over comments on military

Businessman Kevin O'Leary hasn't decided whether he'll enter the Conservative leadership race, but that isn't stopping those already in the race from going after him.

Conservative MPs Michael Chong and Erin O'Toole are both condemning O'Leary for a quote attributed to him concerning Canadian peacekeeping.

Ottawa radio station CFRA quotes O'Leary as saying that Canadians are known as peacekeepers not warriors and "there is nothing proud about being a warrior."

Kevin O'Leary

One of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's senior aides, Gerald Butts, tweeted that the comments were "appallingly disrespectful."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Suicide blast kills dozens in Yemen

TERRORISM

Daesh affiliate claims attack that targeted military camp

A suicide bomber blew himself up outside a military camp in the southern Yemeni city of Aden on Sunday morning, killing at least 52 soldiers, a security official said. Daesh's Yemen-based affiliate claimed responsibility.

Abdel-Rahman al-Naqeeb said 63 people were also injured in the blast. Security officials said that preliminary investigations showed the blast was the work of a bomber wearing an explosives-laden vest. The attack took place as soldiers lined up to collect their salaries, they said.

The Daesh affiliate claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on Daesh-run Aamaq news agency. It identified the bomber as Abu Hashim al-Radfani and published a photo of him smiling and wearing a white vest as he stood next to the group's black flag. It also posted photos it said were of the blast that it claimed killed nearly 70. It was not possible to immediately verify the claim.

The bombing was the latest to underscore how militants have been able to exploit Yemen's conflict to stage large-scale attacks and expand their reach, particularly in the south.

Sunday's blast took place at the same military base that was also struck by a suicide bomber on Dec. 10, killing 57 soldiers. The IS Yemeni affiliate also claimed responsibility for that attack.

In August, another IS-claimed suicide bombing in Aden left 72 people killed when the attacker detonated his pick-up truck among dozens of pro-government recruits. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Soldiers gather the site of a suicide bomb at a base in the city of Aden, Yemen, on Sunday. WAEL QUBADY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Zsa Zsa Gabor dead at 99

Zsa Zsa Gabor in 1986. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Zsa Zsa Gabor, the jet-setting Hungarian actress and socialite who helped invent a new kind of fame out of multiple marriages, conspicuous wealth and jaded wisdom about the glamorous life, has died. She was 99.

The middle and most famous of the sisters Gabor died Sunday of a heart attack at her Bel-Air home, her husband, Prince Frederic von Anhalt, said.

Gabor had been hospitalized repeatedly since she broke her right hip in July 2010 after a fall at her home. She already had to use a wheelchair after being partly paralyzed in a 2002 car accident and suffering a stroke in 2005. Most of her right leg was amputated in January 2011 because of gangrene and the left leg was also threatened. Her misfortunes were duly reported to the media by von Anhalt.

The great aunt of Paris Hilton and a spiritual matriarch to the Kardashians, Simpsons and other tabloid favourites, she was the original hall-of-mirrors celebrity, famous for being famous for being famous. Starting in the 1940s, Gabor rose from beauty queen to millionaire's wife to minor television personality to minor film actress to major public character. With no special talent, no hit TV series such as her sister Eva's Green Acres, Zsa Zsa nevertheless was a long-running hit just being Zsa Zsa — her accent drenched in diamonds, her name synonymous with frivolity and camp as she winked and carried on about men, dahling, and the droll burdens of the idle rich.

In 1998, cultural historian Neal Gabler diagnosed her kind of celebrity as The Zsa Zsa Factor. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

'Atrocities' feared for those still trapped in Aleppo

France struck a compromise Sunday with Russia on a UN resolution that it said would prevent "mass atrocities" in besieged areas of Aleppo, where thousands of trapped civilians and rebel fighters await evacuation in freezing temperatures.

On the ground, prospects for swift evacuations from Aleppo and other besieged areas were thrown into doubt again Sunday after militants burned buses assigned to the rescue operation.

The Aleppo evacuations were to have been part of a wider deal that would simultaneously allow more than 2,000 sick and wounded people to leave two pro-government villages that have been besieged by Syrian rebels. Most villagers are Shiite Muslims, while most rebels are Sunni Muslims.

Smoke rises from government buses, in Idlib, Syria on Sunday. SANA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Six buses that were among those poised to enter the villages of Foua and Kfarya on Sunday were set on fire by unidentified militants, presumably to scuttle any deal.

A video posted online showed armed men near the burning buses as celebratory gunshots rang out. "The buses that came to evacuate the apostates have been burned," the narrator of the video said. He warned that no "Shiite pigs" would be allowed to leave the towns.

Earlier Sunday, pro-Syrian government TV stations showed dozens of buses on standby at a crossing near eastern Aleppo, reportedly poised to resume evacuations from the opposition's last foothold. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

metro VIEWS
Your essential daily news
Monday, December 19, 2016

URBAN ETIQUETTE ELLEN VANSTONE

THE QUESTION

My girlfriend says I have an obligation to visit my drinking buddy's new baby. Is she right?

Dear Ellen,

My best drinking buddy and his wife had a baby a few weeks ago, so he's basically under house arrest for the foreseeable future. I ran into him at a work thing and congratulated him. Now my (sort of) girlfriend tells me I'm socially obligated to go see the actual baby. She seemed incredibly shocked I haven't visited already. Seriously? I have no interest in kids, and doubt the baby gives a diaper-load whether I show up or not. But I don't want to offend anyone either. What's the etiquette here?

Dave

Dear Dave,

Yes, you must go see the baby.

You are right to assume the baby will have as much interest in you as you have in it: zero. In fact, I have a clear mental picture of the entire encounter. Based on nothing more than your clueless attitude and an old boyfriend of mine named Dave, I see you as a man-child-about-town who likes a drink, considers shaving optional and is a good buddy but an undomesticated nightmare of a boyfriend. I imagine your stubbled mug looming over the crib as you exhale alcoholic fumes left over from the previous night's debauchery, while the small human blob trapped by your gaze immediately bursts into tears of terror and disgust.

I must confess, I myself did not appreciate how important this point of etiquette was until I had my own baby.

So be it. The kid will survive, and you will have done your duty. No one is expecting you to forge any kind of meaningful relationship with the blob (assuming you're even capable of forming any kind of meaningful relationship). What we do ask is that you politely honour your friend and his wife's gigantic rite of passage by making an effort to show up.

I must confess, I myself did not appreciate how important this point of etiquette was until I had my own baby. Obviously, close friends and family came by. But I found myself deeply touched when less-close friends and acquaintances also took the trouble to visit or send cards and gifts from afar. It bolstered my nervous-new-mom confidence to share the joy of my daughter's arrival in the world, and the superstitious side of me (which often appears in even the most skeptical of first-time mothers) took all the well-wishing as valuable deposits to a good-luck account that I suddenly realized all children needed in a world that suddenly seemed full of peril.

A small gift is also in order — some kind of stuffie or board book easily obtainable online or from a store recommended by your long-suffering, better-mannered, "sort-of" girlfriend.

If you need to brace yourself any further, please don't use alcohol to do so. Just YouTube "Seinfeld ugly baby" and watch the clip where Jerry and Elaine go to the Hamptons to visit friends who have a hideous newborn infant. If those self-absorbed losers can muster the manners to pretend the baby is cute and worth viewing, I'm sure you can too.

Need advice?
Email Ellen:
scene@metronews.ca

VICKY MOCHAMA

We were promised flying cars; we got a potato chip golden age

This is the future we've been waiting for, and man, is it disappointing.

We spent decades watching feature packages on the nightly news that breathlessly fawned over robots from Japan and cars with abstract design concepts like see-through tires and free will. Yet I still have to take out my own garbage.

(The dog robots were, I think, a mistake. Who wants something with none of the physical ability of a dog, a third as much charm, and one battery too many? If the death of a family dog is traumatic, imagine the emotional havoc of one that powers down midwalk.)

There are plenty of marvellous things about this present world. Nothing but good things can be said of the explosion of potato chip flavors. Entire families have been saved from misadventure and divorce by never having to open a paper map thanks to GPS. Hosannas should be sung to the twin saviors of Google and Apple for sparing countless dinner parties or meetings from devolving into terminal awkwardness through the misapplication of facts.

So, yes, there is a great deal of good by our present technological standards. I am bad enough at texting to know that I would have been a terrible letter writer.

But what happened to all the cool gadgets and experiences we were supposed to have? Why did the end of the space race mean that hover boots are no longer necessary? The Russians may no longer be the enemy (well, maybe; stay tuned), but why does that mean my house cannot casually greet me when I return home via the Tube — that is, a tube that digitally transports humans?

I understand the Cold War was a scary time. Nuclear destruction lurked, spies were everywhere, and the hopes of nations rested on their children's ability to learn math. But we in the West were working towards something at least. America was perfecting the school bully routine that would make it both the beloved high school quarterback of the last half-century and the current hustling salesman for a declining corporation ("Slide joyfully into crushing death. Go. With Visa.")

Canada was right alongside, auditioning for the role of high school sweetheart by softening squabbles, making peace where possible, and being a laid back, less athletic Australia. Australia reached peak whiteness by getting very good at cricket, rugby, surfing and marginalizing aboriginals. And the Europeans pulled slowly out of post-war penury and straight into state-sponsored vacationing. As a group, we flourished.

And then we didn't. Neofascism in Europe, Brexit, Trump, whatever is probably going wrong in Australia: Something seems to have gone terribly wrong in the West and I, for one, blame the fact that my crossword app drains my phone battery.

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+ $1.00 = $29,126
YEAR END BLOWOUT - $5,500
TOTAL SAVINGS $7,424

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INVOICE STK# R16966

2016 FORD F-150 XLT

RETAIL: $51,949
INVOICE: $46,775
+ $1.00 = $46,776
YEAR END BLOWOUT - $8,500
TOTAL SAVINGS $13,673

Birchwood FORD ON REGENT $38,276 +TAXES

Birchwood Ford
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INVOICE STK# R17010

2017 FORD Escape 4dr SE

RETAIL: $32,389
INVOICE: $30,280
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YEAR END BLOWOUT - $500
TOTAL SAVINGS $2,609

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We know a little something extra means a lot this time of year, so 15 lucky Birchwood Credit Solutions customers got a special surprise. Our giveaway winners don't have to make any of their December payments this year.

Here's what a few of them had to say when we called with the news:

I'm liking you a lot right now!

I feel like I've got butterflies in my tummy right now, thank you Birchwood.

The best Christmas ever. I just won Christmas!

Because you're doing this for me, I'll pay it forward this week too. I know Rosberg House is in need of toys.

metro LIFE

Your essential daily news

Julia Roberts to star in her first small-screen project, an adaptation of Today Will Be Different

New lice policy has parents itching

ISTOCK

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Bugging over a more relaxed approach to nits in schools

Genna Buck
Metro Canada

It's a problem that bugs just about every family with school-age kids at some point.

Pediculosis, a.k.a. head lice, is icky, uncomfortable and hard to prevent. But it's not serious or a cause of disease.

And these days, lice-infested youngsters are, mostly, allowed to be in school — a policy that would have been unthinkable in their parents' day.

Tara Auger of Belleville, Ont., was so infuriated when her six-year-old daughter came home with head lice that she paid a visit to her local school board office and health unit this month, child in tow, to make a point.

"The school board was not excited to see me as I brought my daughter with active head lice into the building and allowed her to rub her head onto their chairs and couches. It shouldn't bother them ... since they are allowing kids to pass it around at schools on a daily basis," she wrote in a Facebook post that was shared over 550 times. "If they aren't going to force kids to stay home then there is no motivation for some to treat their kids."

School boards around the country have been bringing their head lice procedures into line with the Canadian Pediatric Society's recommendations, which say there's no rational reason to exclude children with nits or live lice from school or daycare.

According to Dr. Carl Cummings, an author of the CPS lice guidelines, kids found to have live lice don't need to be picked up from school or day care immediately. They can be sent home at the final bell with a note asking parents to use an over-the-counter treatment to kill the critters, and return the next day. A second treatment is recommended in a week or two, just in case some eggs survived.

But some parents are itching to reinstate a traditional, aggressive "no-nit" rule instead. (The Toronto District School Board is an exception. It still has a "no-nit" policy, though it's under review).

Auger started a Change.org petition to bring federal Health Minister Jane Philpott's attention to the issue. It has 500 signatures. A similar one, started by someone else and addressed to Ontario education minister Liz Sandals, has more than 1,000. Facebook groups for parents lamenting the new, liberal approach to lice abound.

The main grouse about the louse: It's unfair to diligent parents that kids with untreated lice are allowed to be in the classroom, constantly re-infecting everyone around them.

Until recently, parents were required to comb out every last louse and egg (nit) before their child was allowed back at school. They were advised to wage war on lice at home: vacuum rugs and furniture, wash the whole family's clothes and bedding in hot water.

Auger said she missed several days of work and kept her daughter home while she went on an anti-lice tear, spending 10 hours in four days combing out nits ("It's basically torture") and cleaning her house top to bottom. The cost, including the treatments, the nit comb, dozens of loads of laundry and lost wages: about $500.

Dr. Cummings said going to such lengths to battle lice is — pun intended — "overkill."

No-nit policies were "creating an atmosphere of worry over something that is annoying, itchy and pretty gross, but in no way endangers anybody's actual health," he said.

Cummings admitted he'd be pretty "appalled" if parents neglect to treat head lice they've been notified about.

Yet it happens, says one Ontario kindergarten teacher, who didn't want to be named.

> **There is no motivation for some to treat their kids.**
> Tara Auger, who went to her local school board office after her daughter Cali came home with head lice

"Last year our school had one ... family (where) the parents just gave up on it."

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario takes no position on the issue, except that teachers' shouldn't be required to do lice checks. The kindergarten teacher favours a middle-ground policy: No-nits is too extreme, but "If there's live lice, the child should be home. Then it's a burden on everybody."

Like many teachers and parents, he doubts the experts' position that most lice spread by direct contact, and that nits alone aren't an infestation.

"I don't have any research base on that," he said. "It's sheer experience."

His school doesn't require kids to be lice-free or provide proof of treatment, but does send them home with a free bottle of medicated shampoo if necessary.

"Our whole society is pushing more and more on the school."

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Share a bit of Canada cool

Holiday Ideas

With just under a week to go before the holidays, you've managed to pare down your gift list to just a few last names. To help you cross off that hard-to-buy-for person, our editors from coast to coast have picked a unique, locally made gift. METRO

Edmonton's got edge

The J5 Table is Edmonton's answer to its critics. Edmonton is cool, hip and infused with a maker culture that many don't see from afar, and the J5 is that taken to new heights, hand made from concrete, wood and glass. Made by Ryspot Designs in Edmonton.

Available at: ryspot.bigcartel.com, $450

Political Circus, happening in Toronto

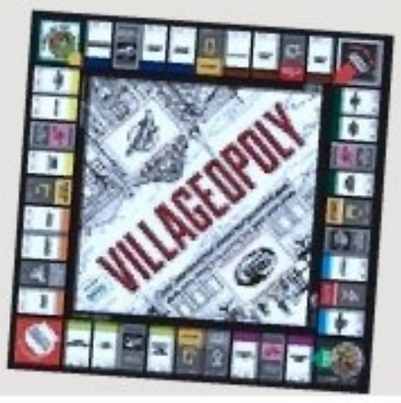
Toronto artist Gabe Thirlwall says popularity of her "political puppets" often mirrors opinion polls — the Justin Trudeau doll is still selling, although not as well as last year, and requests for Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne have dropped. Among this season's best-liked finger puppets, made by silkscreen on mixed textile, are defence minister Harjit Singh Sajjan and Calgary mayor Naheed Nenshi. The pop art project is called Political Circus, aimed at public engagement in politics. **Available at: Etsy/shop/PoliticalCircus, $15 each**

A little practicality coming from Ottawa

Purple Urchin sells environmentally friendly, handcrafted soaps. The Ottawa-based company has dozens of delicious scents to choose from and the prices are reasonable. This is a practical gift for even the most hard-to-shop-for person. **Available at: purpleurchinsoap.com, $5.99 per bar**

The Peg's hot market

Pass Wild Planet. Collect $200. In the Villageopoly board game — a version of Monopoly modelled after Canada's "great neighbourhood," Winnipeg's Osborne Village — you can own one of the strip's hip restaurants or boutiques. Proceeds go to the local Gas Station Arts Centre. **Available at: Call 204-284-9477 or email development@gsac.ca, $50**



Lobster-claw snowflake from the Maritimes

It doesn't get more Nova Scotian than Jampy Furniture's ocean-themed snowflake ornaments. All four designs, particularly the lobster claw, capture the unique flavour of the Maritimes. **Available at: facebook.com/jampyfurniture, $12.50 each or $45 for the set of four.**

Mismatched but looking good in Calgary

Calgary-based biz Friday Sock Company has your feet in mind — and they want them to stand out... by mismatching your socks! Canadian designed, these socks might not look exactly alike, but they look good together. **Available at: fridaysock.co, approximately $15 per set**

Radiating style in Vancouver

East Vancouver's Woodtype Shop creates custom made ultra-cool wooden signs (with lights) that radiate with warm, funky style. Choose the word, style, font, size and colour pallet and then just chill. **Available at: woodtype.ca, $750 (prices vary by sign)**

YOU CAN DO THIS ACCOUNTING

Building up from bottom line

WHY I LIKE MY JOB

Iris Moore, 26, Accounting Supervisor and CPA Candidate.

One of my first jobs was as a customer service representative with a global company, in which the accounting department had a strong partnership with all branches. My academic background in business management and organizational studies helped propel my career to an accounting role with the same company. The position is consultative in nature and I work with all company branches to improve their bottom line.

In school my favourite accounting course was managerial accounting, which is very similar to my current role in that I use and create reporting procedures for other departments and people in the company to help improve efficiencies, drive revenue and save money. I also train new branch employees, so the job is more social than one might suspect.

Working with a global company provides a lot of opportunities for growth. I like the autonomy I have to improve my area's numbers while also developing employees. I enjoy the role because it's incredibly dynamic — one minute I'll be building and analyzing a report and the next I'll be leading an interactive presentation for new hires. I feel like I really make an impact on both the company and its employees.

THE BASICS: Accountant

$49,705

Median annual salary for an entry-level accountant. Those who obtain their CPA designation can expect to earn an average of **$63,000** or more per year.

+4%

Projected job growth rate over the next eight years.

Data for this feature was provided by payscale.com, cpacanada.ca, trade-schools.ca and ontariocolleges.ca

HOW TO START

Accounting technicians and assistants require a two-year diploma in accounting and finance, whereas general accountants will typically require a bachelor of commerce in financial services or a relevant business degree. No matter the program, students will gain a solid background in accounting practices and fundamentals, mathematics of finance, business communications and accounting application software.

WHERE YOU CAN GO

Professional accountants can leverage their analytical and technical skillsets in virtually any industry. This encourages many accountants, bookkeepers, payroll administrators and other financial service specialists to take on a variety of employment opportunities throughout their careers. The option to travel and work across the country or even internationally is appealing for young accountants.

NEXT CAREER STEP

Career advancement in this industry requires the Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA) designation, which serves as a stepping stone to professions such as financial manager and accounting supervisor. Candidates must possess an undergraduate degree to gain admission to the CPA Professional Education Program (PEP). Over time, they may branch out to other areas of accounting, including financial auditing, forensic and tax accounting.

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metro SPORTS

After their latest loss, the Jacksonville Jaguars fired Gus Bradley, ending the least successful coaching tenure (14-48, .225) in NFL history

Ehlers scores twice to fuel Jets' victory over Avs

NHL

Danish forward finding his stride, Scheifele at 30 points

Nikolaj Ehlers isn't particularly interested in personal accolades.

He scored twice and rookie Patrik Laine's three-point outing included his 18th goal of the season early in the second period as the youth in the Winnipeg Jets lineup lifted them to a 4-1 victory over the Colorado Avalanche on Sunday afternoon at MTS Centre.

"All I care about is how the team is doing, and the personal comes second," said second-year Jets forward Ehlers, who was named the first star for a second consecutive game. "But it's not that I've been feeling like I haven't played well. I feel really good and am playing with a lot of confidence, and just playing the game and it has worked out."

Mark Scheifele's two assists make him the first Jet to hit the 30-point plateau this season, while Blake Wheeler's ninth goal of the season proved to be the game-winner.

"He's a guy when it rains it pours. He creates a lot of opportunities," said Wheeler of linemate Ehlers. "It was nice to see him get a good look at the goalie and put it where he wanted to."

Connor Hellebuyck made 27 saves for the Jets (15-16-3), improving his personal record to 12-10-1 on the season.

Calvin Pickard got the start in goal for the Avalanche (11-18-1), but his homecoming was spoiled in his first career NHL start in his hometown of Winnipeg.

"That lapse in the third period, I don't know how quickly they scored the two goals, but it was quick and that was the difference in the hockey game," said Pickard, who stopped 26 of 29 shots to drop his record to 5-6-1 on the season. "When we're hard pressed to score goals I have to come up with another big save."

"It's a lot of fun always coming back to Winnipeg and seeing friends and family, and playing in front of them."

Colorado's lone goal came on the power play with just over two minutes left to play as Jarome Iginla scored his fourth of the season.

Ehlers' second of the game was an empty-netter with 30 seconds remaining. Three of Ehlers' seven goals this season have come in his last four games, after snapping a 15-game drought.

Winnipeg — now 10-1-0 when leading after two periods this season — widened their lead over Colorado for sixth in the Central Division, with the Avalanche now 10 points back of the Jets' 33 points.

The Jets have now completed the home portion of their pre-holiday break schedule, with games on Tuesday and Thursday — both in Vancouver — in a rare double-dip against the Canucks.

Colorado now travels to Minnesota to finish a quick two-game divisional road trip with a matchup against the Wild on Tuesday. The Avalanche finish the unofficial first half of their schedule by hosting the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday and visiting the Chicago Blackhawks on Friday before the Christmas break.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

SUNDAY At MTS Centre

JETS	AVS
4	1

Jets Patrik Laine, Nikolaj Ehlers and Mark Scheifele celebrate after Ehlers scored into an empty net on Sunday. TREVOR HAGAN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

NHL

Torts reaches 500-win plateau

The Columbus Blue Jackets made John Tortorella sweat for his 500th NHL victory.

Columbus blew leads of 2-0 and 3-2 in the third period before Seth Jones scored 46 seconds into overtime Sunday as the Blue Jacked defeated the Vancouver Canucks 4-3 for their ninth straight win.

Tortorella is the first U.S.-born coach to reach 500 victories and 24th overall.

John Tortorella GETTY IMAGES FILE

It looked like Tortorella might not get another opportunity after one forgettable season with the Canucks in 2013-14, a campaign that saw the team miss the playoffs for the first time since 2008.

"It makes no difference, quite honestly," Tortorella said when asked if getting to 500 in Vancouver meant more.

"Coming here is fun for me because I have a lot of friends here. You guys may think that: 'He wants to get back at them.' That's not the way I am thinking. It's a tremendous city, the people always treated me well."

Sergei Bobrovsky made 14 saves for his league-leading 19th win. THE CANADIAN PRESS

IN BRIEF

Hamelin captures gold in short-track speedskating

Charles Hamelin won gold and Charle Cournoyer took bronze in a men's 1,000-metre race as Canada claimed four medals Sunday at a World Cup short-track speedskating stop in Gangneung, South Korea.

The Canadian men's relay team collected a medal for the first time this season by earning silver, while the women's relay team won bronze as Canada ended the two-day event with nine medals. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Raptors devour Magic

DeMar DeRozan scored 31 points and Jonas Valanciunas added 16 points and 13 rebounds, helping the Toronto Raptors beat the Magic 109-79 on Sunday night in Orlando.

DeRozan has scored at least 30 points in four straight games and 15 times overall this season. Toronto exploded in the third quarter to open a 20-point lead and has scored 100 points in 14 consecutive games, the longest active streak in the NBA.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NFL

Packers stay hot to put Bears on ice

Packers receiver Jordy Nelson hauls in a 60-yard reception ahead of the Bears' Cre'von LeBlanc on Sunday in Chicago. JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

It wasn't the 1967 Ice Bowl between Green Bay and the Dallas Cowboys, or even the coldest game ever played at Soldier Field.

Yet, both the Chicago Bears and Packers withstood harsh conditions, and Green Bay came up with the victory Sunday.

Aaron Rodgers hit Jordy Nelson with a 60-yard pass and Mason Crosby kicked a 32-yard field goal as time expired to lift the Packers to 30-27 victory on a day when the game-time temperature was -11 C.

SUNDAY In Chicago

PACKERS	BEARS
30	27

Bears quarterback Matt Barkley led a fourth-quarter comeback from a 27-10 deficit and completed 30 of 42 for 362 yards with two touchdowns — but had three interceptions.

It was Green Bay's fourth straight victory.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAKE IT TONIGHT

Easy Cheese Pear Melt

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

Our goal this week is fast and easy dinner. This grilled cheese is amped up with delicious extras like sliced pears and mushrooms and a hit of Dijon for zing.

Ready in 15 minutes
Prep time: 5 minutes
Cook time: 10 minutes
Serves 1

Ingredients
- Butter
- Cremini mushrooms, thinly sliced
- Pumpernickel bread
- Dijon mustard (optional)
- Fontina cheese, grated
- Pears, thinly sliced

Directions

1. In a skillet, melt a pat of butter over medium heat. Toss in sliced mushrooms and push around until they soften. Remove from pan and set aside. Wipe pan.

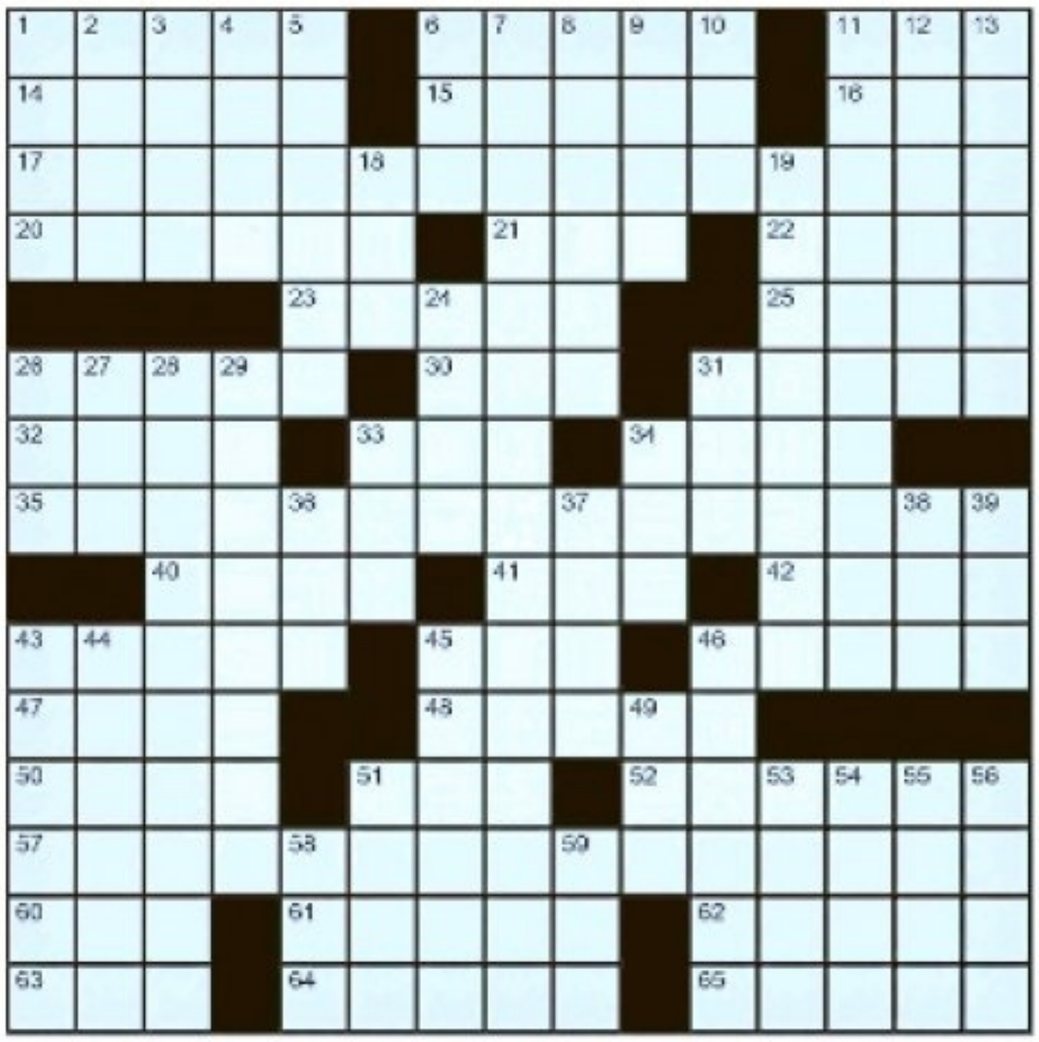
2. Butter bread (and swipe other side with a bit of Dijon) and place each piece in pan, butter side down. Place a handful of Fontina on each, then press down a couple of slices of pear, followed by a spoonful of mushrooms. Place another piece of pumpernickel on top, butter side out. Let sizzle 2 or 3 minutes, peeking at the underside with a spatula to ensure bread is toasting not burning. Flip.

3. Allow to grill for a couple more minutes then remove from the heat. Cut in half and serve warm.

FOR MORE MEAL IDEAS, VISIT SWEETPOTATOCHRONICLES.COM

CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. Jewelry fastener
6. Tropical beach gear
11. Boxer's size stat.
14. Broadcaster
15. Taboos
16. Charlemagne's li'l domain
17. Christmas Eve gifts for Santa: 3 wds.
20. Send word
21. Merriment
22. 'Meteor' suffixes
23. Serenity, __ peace
25. Filmmaker Ms. Riefenstahl
26. __ kit (Heath 'cleanse' purchase)
30. Water wiggler
31. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? playwright Edward
32. Story told backwards?
33. Food scrap
34. Latin hymn: "Dies __"
35. "Sleigh Ride" bit: "We're riding along with a song / Of a ____"
40. Christmastime
41. Wheat: French
42. Montana's motto, '__ Plata'
43. Krispy __ Doughnuts
45. Mr. Gore's
46. Swamp plant
47. Canadian hardware store
48. Respond
50. Book's ID
51. Ms. Messing, mini-ly
52. Rooming house tenant
57. Christmastime 'tis the what?: 4 wds.
60. Sigma's alphabetic follower
61. Lake __ (American ski resort area)
62. __ Lumpur, Malaysia
63. "Delish!"
64. City of Honshu in Japan
65. Suze __ (Personal finance TV personality)

DOWN
1. Cereal brand, __'_ Crunch
2. "__ & Stitch" (2002)
3. "How now, ___?" - Hamlet
4. Son of Ramses I
5. 'Hemi' or 'Micro', for example
6. Ski hill machine, __-Cat
7. Literary purchase that also serves as a home decor feature: 3 wds.
8. Straighten hair
9. Benefit
10. Mount __ (Volcano in Japan)
11. Santa Claus feature: 2 wds.
12. Canadian star Lorne of "Bonanza"
13. Music hall star Ms. O'Shea who shared the billing the famous night The Beatles first appeared on "The Ed Sullivan Show" in 1964
18. Equivalent word [abbr.]
19. Eastern Ontario: The Township of __-Hagarty-Richards
24. Spongy toys brand
26. Mountain __ (Soft drink)
27. 'E' in REO
28. Christmas carol from Germany: "O __"
29. Living room pieces
31. 'Bound' suffix
33. Popeye's sweetie Olive
34. U2's li'l land
36. Riddle-me-__
37. Ingrid's celebrated movie role
38. Eggy Christmas beverage
39. Tie-__
43. Ms. Swanson of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" (1992)
44. Dominica's capital
45. Vocal legend Ms. Franklin
46. Canadian skater Elvis
49. Canadian actor Mr. Bennett
51. Scientific 'strands'
53. Sullen
54. 1970s music genre, __ Rock
55. "__ Enchanted" (2004)
56. Mr. Seacrest
58. It means 'Ear'
59. Maude's portrayer

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS Your daily horoscope by Francis Drake

Aries March 21 - April 20
Grab every chance to travel, because you need a change of scenery. Likewise, you will love to learn something new if you take a course or study something unusual.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
You can make headway clearing up loose details about shared property, inheritances, taxes and debt. Just roll up your sleeves and dig in. Now is the time!

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You can learn a lot about your style of relating to friends, spouses and partners at this time. Observe your style of dealing with those who are closest to you.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
You have a lot of stuff, and anything you do to help you feel better organized is a good thing. What can you do today to make your life run more smoothly?

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
You want to play and take time off from drudgery, even if it's just catching a game or going out for dinner or seeing a movie. You need some fun!

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Because you will likely earn more money soon, this is a good time to think about how you can make home repairs. You also might be focused on a parent more than usual.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
This is a busy time for you, because short trips, reading, writing and talking to everyone will keep you on the go. Enjoy this accelerated pace.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
It's important to know what your money situation is. How much do you own? How much do you make? How much do you owe? Knowledge is power.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Make the most of this time with three planets are in your sign. It's easy to attract positive situations now, which means you can come out on top.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You might want to hide for a few days, because you're not ready to step out into the world. When your birthday arrives, things will be different.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Enjoy your popularity with others now. Probably more than any other sign in the zodiac, friendships mean a lot to you.

Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
Because you look so good to bosses and VIPs, use this time to go after what you want. Promote your own agenda. Speak up.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

					6	1		
				4			8	
				8			4	7
	4	9			2	7		
5			3	7	1		6	
1							2	
	8						9	
		6	7	2	4	3		
			6		8			

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Your daily crossword and Sudoku answers from the play page.

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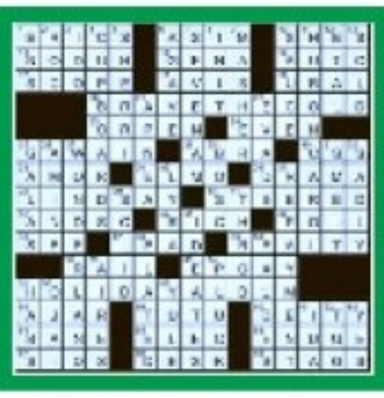

6	9	2	8	3	7	5	4	1
4	5	8	6	1	9	2	3	7
3	7	1	4	2	5	9	8	6
9	4	5	2	8	1	7	6	3
1	6	3	5	7	4	8	2	9
2	8	7	3	9	6	4	1	5
7	3	6	9	4	8	1	5	2
8	2	9	1	5	3	6	7	4
5	1	4	7	6	2	3	9	8

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